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Capitol Building
Helena, Mt

Thank you for the opportunity to share with you ideas and issues that effect Montana businesses.

I am Steve Marks owner of Marks Ranch & Lumber in Clancy Montana. Our operation include ranching, a sawmill, manufacturing specialty lumber products, a mechanized logging operation and a wood waste grinding operation, that combined, directly employ fifteen fulltime employees.

Today, there are several things I bring fourth and encourage you to look at that effect my business and many other businesses in Montana.

- Business equipment tax

In the last year I purchased a \$ 575,000. 00 grinder and my business equipment tax on this one machine was just a little over \$ 11,000.00

We need to eliminate the tax, studies have shown and other states have proven that with no business equipment tax, entrepreneurs will invest in technology, equipment, and grow their business and employ more people.

- Permitting of Grinders and Chippers

SB 47, with the pine beetle epidemic that is sweeping across Montana, we need all of the tools available to take care of the mountains of wood and wood waste

created from this catastrophe. Chippers and grinders are a key piece of machinery used in this process. These machines either portable or self propelled, are often times moved many times a month to process this woody material, permitting is expensive, burdensome, and another piece of bureaucratic red tape that businesses would have to go through.

- Excess Forest Fire Funds

Take all of the excess fire fighting funds that are left unspent form the previous Biennium and use this money for hazard fuel reduction work. This last Biennium there was approximately twenty million dollars left. At an average cost of approximately \$950.00 per acre, less 8% administrative costs we could treat 19,368 acres of high hazard fuels in the Wildland Urban Interface.

The DNRC' Jump Start Fuel Hazard Reduction program was a huge success and when these funds are available, could be administered by the DNRC under the similar rules.

- Workers compensation

Reform and overhaul the current system. Montana is now rated as the number one in the Nation as the highest rate of insurance for workers compensation. From my own experience of employee fraudulent claims and a lack of employer advocacy from Mt. State Fund, I was forced to buy my Workers Compensation Insurance from a private insurer at much better pricing. How is it we have the highest Workers Compensation Insurance with very high administrative costs and a brand new castle in downtown Helena?

Thank you

Steve Marks